



Heal the Bay

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March 24, 2009

Delivered via electronic mail to:

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[dgeorge@scc.ca.gov](mailto:dgeorge@scc.ca.gov)

Attn: Doug George

Secretary Mike Chrisman, Chair  
California Ocean Protection Council  
Attn: Sam Schuchat, Ocean Protection Council Secretary  
Coastal Conservancy Executive Officer  
California Coastal Conservancy  
1330 Broadway, Suite 1300  
Oakland, CA 94612

**Re: Support for the Completion of a Master Environmental Assessment (MEA) on single-use (plastic and paper) and reusable bags.**

Dear Secretary Chrisman and Members of the Council:

Heal the Bay commends the California Ocean Protection Council for its leadership in addressing marine debris as a critical issue facing California's coast and ocean. Heal the Bay is an environmental nonprofit dedicated to making southern California's coastal waters and watersheds safe, healthy and clean. Please accept our support for the recommended action to complete a Master Environmental Assessment (MEA) on single-use (plastic and paper) and reusable bags. This MEA will provide the necessary background information for California municipalities to complete Environmental Impact Reports (EIR) for the development of ordinances placing restrictions on usage of the single-use bags.

As you know, the Ocean Protection Council has clearly identified that single-use plastic bags significantly contribute to the serious litter and marine debris problem facing the state. For that reason, OPC's Ocean Litter Implementation Strategy includes as Priority Action #2 a call for a prohibition on single-use products that pose significant ocean litter impacts where a less damaging alternative is available.

At least twenty California cities have heeded this call for action and are developing ordinances intended to minimize or eliminate single-use bags through the adoption of bans on plastic bags and, in some cases, fees on paper bags. Current California law (AB 2449) preempts local governments from imposing fees on plastic single-use plastic bags, so municipalities have largely been moving forward with plastic single-use bag prohibitions. The intent of these efforts is to encourage consumers to switch to reusable bags, a more environmentally friendly alternative to plastic or paper. Both bans and fees have proven effective in reducing the usage of single-use bags and the resulting litter. In Ireland a fee on single-use plastic bags has resulted in an over 90% decrease in plastic bag use and bag litter.



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A ruling issued February 20, 2009, in Los Angeles County on a challenge under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) to a municipal plastic bag ban now requires that municipality to complete an EIR before it can implement its ban.

Completion of an MEA on single-use bags will greatly simplify the EIR process for these cities, allowing them to incorporate the MEA into their individual EIRs, saving time and money, and facilitating the implementation of single-use bag regulations throughout the state. Thank you for considering our input.

Sincerely,

Sarah Sikich  
Coastal Resources Director